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SUBJECT: SUDAN/DARFUR: NEW FIGHTING ERUPTS BETWEEN SAF,
SLM/MINAWI, AND NRF IN NORTH AND WEST DARFUR

¶1. (SBU) Summary: Fresh fighting has erupted in both North and West Darfur between Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), allied with rebels from the Sudanese Liberation Movement/Minawi (SLM/Minawi) faction, and militias from the National Redemption Front (NRF). The fighting is notable because it is the first time since the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) on May 5 that the SAF has initiated attacks on rebels remaining outside the agreement. Both sides continue to mass forces, so fighting is likely to flare up yet again. Charge Hume has several high level meetings in the coming days, and will raise the matter with the government. End summary.

¶2. (U) On July 26, approximately 50-100 SAF military vehicles, some mounted with anti-aircraft weapon systems and rocket launchers, and fuel trucks assembled at the El Geneina airport. Soldiers were observed in full battle gear waving flags and shouting pro-government slogans. They later headed northeast, reportedly towards Jebel Moon, a mountainous area along the Sudan-Chad border. A SAF spokesman described the fighting in Jebel Moon as operations aimed at preventing rebels from looting from civilians.

¶3. (SBU) In a separate (though perhaps related) incident on July 28, a SLM/Wahid rebel spokesman accused the SAF of attacking Kulkul (North Darfur), approximately 35 km north of El Fasher, using Janjaweed, three attack helicopters, and Antonov aircraft, in the process forcing hundreds of civilians to flee to safety in El Fasher. A SAF spokesman later confirmed the clashes, but said that it was NRF rebels who initiated the attack by ambushing its forces. SAF denied the use of either Janjaweed or aircraft in the fighting. The African Union and United Nations issued a joint statement late on July 28 condemning the violence and blaming the government and Janjaweed for the attack on the NRF. The UN and AU also recalled that an attack on any party to the Darfur conflict is either a breach of the DPA or a violation of previous agreements concluded on the basis of the N'Djamena Ceasefire Agreement. UNSRSG Pronk plans to visit the region August 1. The U.S. Representative to the CFC will ask for an investigation into the attacks. AMIS identified the SAF build-up of troops and supplies over several days, but did not/not ask them what was happening.

Current situation

¶4. (SBU) Jebel Moon: Contacts of ARC officer El Fasher report no ongoing fighting in the vicinity of Jebel Moon. Apparently, after attacking Jebel Moon from both the north and south, NRF rebels were able to push SAF elements back. UNDSS suspects the first attacks were probing; SAF massed near Gosmina (NFI), probably awaiting a go-ahead for offensive operations within the next 24-72 hours. SAF composition includes at least 50 vehicles, supported by Janjaweed.

¶5. (SBU) Kulkul: Kulkul has been relatively quiet since the fighting on July 28. The SAF has continued its ongoing build-up in El Fasher. ARC officer in El Fasher reports there is a distinct increase in the number of soldiers and policemen openly carrying

weapons. In addition, an SLA/Minawi contingent of 70 vehicles is moving toward Kulkul from Haskanit. Another report states that an SLA/Minawi element of 80 vehicles is moving west to seal off parts of the border with Chad. At the El Fasher airfield three Hind attack helicopters and two Antonov bombers are currently parked. ARC officer reports that the helicopters have been conducting operations.

16. (SBU) Comment: It appears that the Sudanese government may be using the post-DPA signing period as an opportunity to attack those outside the agreement. Specifically, it intends to encircle both rebels with ties to Chad, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and remaining holdouts who have coalesced into the recently-formed National Redemption Front (NRF). An assortment of armed groups that remained outside of the peace agreement, including Chadian-sponsored elements, are known to be taking shelter in the Jebel Moon mountains. End comment.

STEINFELD